

## Appleby Archaeology January 2008

The January meeting of Appleby Archaeology Group marked the tenth anniversary of the group and started with the Annual General Meeting which was followed by the Members' Evening.

The sequence of events had to be revised due to the inability of one memory stick to communicate with the laptop for a power point presentation and Harry Hawkins started the celebrations by reviewing *Ten years of Appleby Archaeology*. As he spoke a pictorial record of the group's activities and some local sites were displayed on the screen.

In late 1996 Martin Railton had set the idea of forming a group in motion and in 1997 it became established. Meetings were held in the Sixth Form Centre of Appleby Grammar School at first but in 2002 the venue changed to the Supper Room and from that time the group has flourished and now has a membership of around sixty.

He spoke of the importance of membership participation and their becoming involved in fieldwork. Early on Martin gave a series of lectures and instruction in fieldwork techniques and in 2000 the group started a landscape survey which involved members recording any features they saw in their local area. This was curtailed in 2001 by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease but as a result of the work done a project at Kirklands started in 2002. The area of interest was surveyed and recorded over the next three years but regrettably permission for a small excavation was not obtained. It is now hoped that a new project on Brackenber Moor will involve the membership over the next few years.

Harry then spoke of the group's aim in concentrating on a broad range of archaeological topics. The talks have included subjects from all periods, from prehistory to second world war defences often with a local emphasis but the group has heard of excavations as far afield as Orkney, Norfolk and Slovakia. The summer outings have found members exploring sites such as Thornburgh Henge in North Yorkshire and nearer home Long Meg and her Daughters, Whitley Castle and Nenthead Lead Mines.

The group has run two very successful conferences, the first in 2005 on the *Romans in Eden* and the second in 2007 on the *People and the Land*. A visit from Time Team to Appleby in 2002 and in 2003 an Artefacts Day in the Market Hall, organised by the group, to mark National

Archaeology Day, have stimulated interest from the community

Harry concluded by saying that he felt, that over the ten years, the aims had been met but it would be the membership and the next ten years that would determine this .

In the interval between the talks a celebratory cake, made by Jackie Mayes was cut by Martin Railton and a toast was proposed to the next ten years of Appleby Archaeology. Thanks to local expertise the laptop and memory stick were now communicating and Phyllis Rouston was able to give an illustrated talk on *Archaeology on Arran*.

The island which lies in the [Firth of Clyde](#) is sometimes referred to as "Scotland in Miniature" as the rocks and landforms mimic the rest of Scotland. Ancient metamorphic rocks, some 800 million years old, and intrusive granites form the higher ground of the north and younger, 250-340 million year old, sedimentary rocks underlie the gentler agricultural land of the south. The island is rich in archaeology and on every walk there was something of interest from Neolithic chamber tombs to medieval castles. Phyllis spoke in more detail about the Neolithic monuments on Machrie Moor which lies on the west side of the island.

It is a spectacular location, where a bleak moor is encircled by a ring of, often snow covered, mountains. The moor is notable for the number and variety of monuments which are representative of most aspects of prehistoric life and include chambered tombs, cairns and hut circles as well as a group of six stone circles lying within an area of 400 square metres. Each circle appears different prompting Dr Aubrey Burl to describe the complex as "the best group of architecturally varied stone circles in western Europe". Two circles combine two types of stone, red sandstone and granite boulders and four are composed of either granite or sandstone the rocks chosen being of contrasting textures and colours. Five of the six circles were first described in 1832 but it was not until the site was stripped of peat during Dr Aubrey Burl's investigations in 1978 that the presence of the sixth was confirmed. In 1985-86 there was further excavation and the findings from both these investigations provided a chronology of the activities on the moor from 3000BC

The earliest features were pits and gullies some containing pottery which could be dated to about 3000BC Around 2100BC timber circles were erected. Hazel and oak fragments and pottery found in the post holes of the timbers enabled these monuments to be dated. There then seemed

to be a period of time when the area was used for agriculture. There was extensive evidence of ploughing ,and analysis indicated that the crops were of barley type grasses and that the land had been manured using seaweed. It is difficult to date the building of the stone circles but it is thought they were erected around 1740BC. Two circles were fully excavated. One made up of eleven stones of which six were granite and five smaller sand stones The second had ten stones, nine sandstone and one granite boulder. Sometime later cremated remains were buried within the circles and associated with these burials the archaeologists found pottery shards of a cordoned urn, bone pins, burned flints and human teeth. These features and the existence of similar sites and artefacts in neighbouring areas suggested a date of 1450-1250BC. After the stone circles fell into disuse and before peat began to form over the sites there would appear to have been another phase of farming activity but dating by pollen analysis was impossible due to contaminants passing through the dry cracked peat.

Phyllis conclude her talk by moving forward in time to the Iron Age and showing some dramatic pictures of the fort on Drumadoon Point. Doon Fort, once bounded by a wall on the landward side occupies an area of 5 hectares on a commanding headland, Forts of similar size, surrounded by a single wall, occur sporadically in the coastlands of west Scotland, and may have formed local tribal centres or "oppida". The final slide was of one of Arran's other attractions and showed seals basking just off shore.

The next talk will be on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> February at 7.30pm, in the Supper Room, Market Hall, Appleby, when Linda Corrigan of the English Place Name Society will talk on *Tracking the Norsemen*

PHR 22/1/08